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ABSTRACT

The present report describes a system for the care of children during the day in Denmark: care in private family homes. Begun in 1966, this program organized a formal system of family day care homes initiated and supervised by the government; this is an extension of the former system of licensing privately initiated family day care homes. From the Danish experience, a number of principles emerge which appear to be relevant to the United States. It is possible for the government to conduct a program of surveillance for quality control and to establish a minimal standard of care for each child. A family day care home system has the special advantages of being an important source of strength to the family, offers a rewarding career for women who prefer to work at home, and has the possibility of rapid expansion. It is suggested that because of children's needs and parental preferences more than one type of day care service should be offered. (CS)

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FAMILY DAY CARE IN DENMARK

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PS 007368

A previous report " Group Day Care in Denmark: A Century and a Half of Experience " has described in some detail group day care of children in facilities established for this purpose in Denmark.* The present report supplements the previous report by describing a separate system for the care of children during the day in Denmark: care in private family homes.

The care of children during the day in a private home by someone other than the parents is, of course, probably as old as history. The idea that society should be concerned with the quality of such care is a much newer concept. As indicated in the report on group day care, "Over 75 years ago, in 1888, a law was passed in Denmark requiring that no one receive a child under 14 years of age in care for pay without first having obtained permission from the government of the local township**. This permission, which was necessary for day care in private homes as well as group centers, was revokable at any time. This law still holds today." Clearly Denmark has, for a long time, concerned itself with the quality of day care of children in private family homes. What has evolved from this experience?

A previous report "Family Guidance in Denmark: A Program in Preventive Child Care" reviewed the overall organization and administration of welfare services in Denmark: "The national government of Denmark is responsible for passing laws outlining the type and scope of services to be offered to the people. The laws also specify how the funding of these programs will be shared. The administrative departments of the national government then 'flesh out' the laws with bulletins which make recommendations with regard to the details of running such programs. The

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running of the programs themselves, however, is entirely the responsibility of the local districts or Townships. Since passing the 1888 law regarding day care, the Danish legislature has expanded and revised the day care laws from time to time, the last major revision occuring in 1964. The Ministry of Social Affairs is the administrative department which is given responsibility for 'fleshing out' the law with regard to day care through policy making, standard setting and general surveillance." While the Ministry of Social Affairs has written a number of directives for the Townships concerning group day care institutions, the extraordinary expansion of family day care homes is such a recent phenomina that the Ministry has not yet expanded on the basic law by issueing any official directives with regard to this latter type of day care.

Prior to 1964 the mechanism for the safeguarding of the quality of families taking in children for day care consisted of an investigation of the home by the Child and Youth Committee of the local Township.* Anyone wishing to provide day care in their home applied to this Committee for a license. An investigation including an evaluation of the health conditions by health authorities and an evaluation of the social conditions by a member of the staff of the Child and Youth Committee (usually a social worker) was then conducted. If the investigation of the home proved satisfactory, the home would be licensed by the Township for this purpose. The law stipulates that the license shall indicate the number and type of children allowed to receive day care in this home. In no case, according to the law, shall a family take more than 7 children into day care as this would then be considered group or institutional care. In addition, no more than 3 children under three years of age may be placed with one family. A family may not provide day care for a child with any abnormality unless it has been approved for this purpose. The home shall be re-evaluated at regular intervals and the license can be revoked at any time. A further protection

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was provided by the practice of encouraging any citizen, lay or professional, who feels that a family day care home is not providing the best care to children to report this concern to the Child and Youth Committee for special investigation.

This private family type of day care, then, was conducted on the basis of private, volutary initiative. The authorities wished only to provide quality control to an existing, indigenous, unsystematic child care phenomina. The number of such licensed homes was not large: in 1961, for example, there were 688 children in Denmark in such care.* It was recognized, of course, that larger numbers of children were in the care of relatives and neighbors who were not being paid for such care. The authorities wished only to formally control care of a commercial nature and leave the safeguarding of non-commercial care to the informal system of voluntary reporting to the Child and Youth Committee of unfavorable conditions of children by any citizen in the community.**

The last decade has witnessed a dramatic change in family day care in Denmark. The above described program for licensing of privately initiated family day care has, of course, continued to operate. A new program, however, has been added: a formal system of family day care homes initiated and supervised by the government. This new system was in response to the rapidly increasing demand for day care in Denmark. Citizen groups, voluntary organizations, etc. were putting pressure on the Townships as well as the national government to do something about the rapidly growing waiting lists for group day care. Two facts were instrumental in provoking the establishment of a system of family day care homes: while group day care institutions were being established at a rapidly increasing rate, it was clear that it would be a number of years before the supply would catch up

* See our report on group day care for demographic data on children in Denmark.

** See our report on child advocacy in Denmark.

with the need; it seemed clear to the Danes that there was a certain group of children whose day care needs were better met in a private home with only several children than in the larger group care centers.

In 1966 Copenhagen Township responded accordingly by establishing the first formal, government sponsored system of family day care homes in Denmark. A separate office in the Township's Department of Child and Youth Affairs was established to administer this new program. This program has become the prototype for similar programs started subsequently in other parts of Denmark. The popularity and subsequent growth of these programs has been extraordinary. Only 4 years later, in 1970, Copenhagen Township had over 600 children receiving day care in this system and by 1972 over 800 children were placed in over 600 homes in Copenhagen. By 1972, 170 of the 250 Townships in Denmark had established family day care homes in which over 7000 day care mothers were caring for over 14,000 children, 10,000 of whom were under 3 years of age.

In spite of this rapid expansion of family day care homes, waiting lists remain. In Copenhagen, for example, there are nearly as many children on the waiting list as there are children in the program. This waiting list, however, includes no high risk children (all of whom are placed) and many names on the list are unborn children. It is important, consequently, to understand the process of selection of children for this program.

As mentioned previously, it is felt there is a certain group of children who fare better in family day care than in group day care. These are children under 3 years of age who are considered to be at high risk from a developmental point of view. Referred to this program by physicians, social workers, public health nurses and others including the parents, they are, frequently, the babies of "lonely" mothers (unwed mothers), children from broken homes, or homes with some known pathology (perhaps a retarded or disturbed sibling, or an alcoholic father). Children of student parents, of low income families, or children whose

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parents have chronic illnesses, are also given priority for admittance to this program. In addition, abnormal children (physically handicapped, behavior problems, etc.) frquently receive day care in a family home rather than a group day care center. All such risk children, then, are given such high priority that they are all placed. It is unfortunate that the Danes have no data to substantiate their impression that family day care is superior for such risk children. The remaining children in this program, however, are normal children whose parents prefer family day care to group day care centers. It is the rapidly increasing popularity of family day care among normal parents of normal children which results in the waiting lists.

Although the program was designed to benefit children, it also provides a fringe benefit to others in the community. Women whose major talent lies in the creative rearing of young children, yet prefer to work at home, (perhaps because they have children of their own to care for) are provided with a means of expressing themselves and of supplementing their income in the way in which they are most suited. The women are recruited through advertisements and notices placed in the newspapers and through announcements on radio and television. When a woman applies for this work her police and health records first are screened. If all is well, she is then interviewed by a supervisor. It has been the experience of the agencies which administer this program that the only certain way to determine if a woman is good at this type of work is to watch her in action. A woman who is felt by the interviewer to be a likely potential day care mother is, consequently, employed on a trial basis at first, and is observed very closely during a 3 month probation period. Her home is inspected for suitability and it must be clean, have at least two rooms, and have adequate plumbing and kitchen facilities. There are no special educational requirements for selection. In general, women chosen are between the ages of 21 and 55 years of age. Preference is given to women with experience in rearing their own children. Initially many of the day care mothers were former Child Nurses* who now had children

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of their own. In preparation for employment a woman is given a thorough physical examination; if she is hired, she must have a yearly tuberculosis check. At the present time, the day care mother receives 160 Danish Kroner (approximately $ 23) per week for each child under her care. She must provide all of the food which the child eats during the day but the government provides baby bottles, diapers and play equipment.

Day care mothers with previous special training or skills may have official approval in their contract for the day care of difficult children--those with physical handicaps, retardation or severe behavior difficulties. In Copenhagen Township, for example, approximately 100 of the present 600 day care mothers in the government sponsered program are so approved.

In a manner quite traditional in Denmark, the day care mothers have formed a new national Union of day care mothers. One purpose of this Union is to negotiate with the government for the best working conditions and pay scale for Union members. The Union works closely with other similar Unions such as the Union of Child Nurses. As a result of this Union's effort, a model contract between day care mother and the Township has been accepted as standard throughout Denmark, thus guaranteeing equal pay and working conditions for all day care mothers. Items in this contract include: 3 months probation for new day care mothers before a contract is signed; a basic salary of 160 Danish Kroner per week per child; the number of children this day care mother may care for; the type of children this day care mother may care for; the day care mother must practice professional confidence in discussing her day care children and their parents with others; the day care mother must be willing to accept children in her home from 6 AM to 6 PM; no single child may remain in a day care home over 9 hours a day except in unusual circumstances; one month notice is required on both sides before termination of contract. The Union also works to raise the level of excellence and professional standing of its members. At present the Union has over 1000 day care mothers as members.

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important tasks of the supervisor. She attempts to carefully match the child and his problems and needs with the day care mother and her home and family. A child of an unwed mother will be placed with a family where the father is frequently present, for example. Consideration is given to the distance a parent must travel to bring his child to the day care home. If possible a child is placed in the same general neighborhood environment with which he is familiar at home. Usually one or two children are placed in a day care home, rarely three. When a day care mother has children of her own under the age of three, then her own children are included in this census; older children in the home are not counted, as they are felt to be "mother's helpers".

When a home has been selected for an infant, the supervisor goes with the infant's mother and introduces her to the day care mother. The child is then placed in the day care home on a trial basis. An important duty of the day care mother is the establishment of a friendly relationship with the natural mother which will permit her to make helpful suggestions with regard to child rearing. This is a delicate task: she must make sure that the child's mother does not feel that her primary role in mothering is being usurped. After awhile the children usually begin to call the worker "Mor", the Danish equivalent of Mommy; the skillful day mother helps the natural mother to accept this without threat. The supervisor assists closely in the development of a good worker-parent relationship; if it fails to develop, the child is placed in a different day care home.

The supervisors who are so vital in assuring the success of this service come from a variety of backgrounds: they may have been nursery school teachers, or child nurses, for example. They are selected on the basis of maturity, experience in child rearing and child care, facility in relating to others and ability to function independently. Smaller Townships may have one supervisor while larger Townships are divided into districts with a full time supervisor for each district. Copenhagen, the largest Township in Denmark, is divided into 10 districts with 10 supervisors. At first the 10 supervisors worked out of one central

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office. Gradually each supervisor is being supplied with an office in her own district. If a district has a social service center* her office is located in the center. The district office has enough space for a small play area where day care mothers can bring their children. While the supervisor talks with day care mothers, and the mothers chat with each other, the children have a chance to play together in larger groups. The administration of this program is being gradually decentralized to these district offices.

There is a chief and two assistant chiefs responsible for the overall administration of this particular program at the central office of the Child and Youth Department in Copenhagen. At this office each morning between 6 and 8 o'clock is a worker who is present to receive calls from any day care mother who is sick or is otherwise unable to care for children that day. This worker will then call a substitute day care mother from a list of such women who will be willing to take over for that day. Between 8 and 9 o'clock each morning each district supervisor is available at the district office phone for calls from both parents and day care mothers regarding any problems which may have arisen. Perhaps a child is too ill to be taken to the day care home: the supervisor may arrange for a homemaker service in the child's own home so that his mother may go to work that day, as usual. A call may come in from either a parent or a day care mother about some other problem best handled by a meeting with supervisor, parent and worker all present. Such a meeting is immediately arranged. Meetings of this type are held on a regular basis at a minimum of twice a month, even when no acute problems arise. The day care mother may anticipate at least two unannounced visits a month in her home from her district supervisor.

Although there is no special training given to day care mothers prior to starting such a career, there is a program of inservice training. In smaller Townships this usually consists of the day care mothers meeting in the evening with their supervisors once a month. In Copenhagen Township, however, this program

* See our report on group day care.

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has just been formalized into the Township's adult evening school system. A 69 hour course for day care mothers, paid for by the Township, has been developed. The workers attend the class one night a week (3 hours) for 5 months and are given transportation money for this purpose. Different experts cover different subjects including: legal responsibilities and child law; child health; nutrition; first aid; growth and development; creative play; parent interaction.*

Another recent innovation in the inservice training program for day care mothers is the holiday camp. The Township sponsors and arranges for a group of day care mothers to spend a week in the countryside with their own preschool children and their day care children. Five or six day care mothers with 12 to 15 such children stay together with their supervisor, a kindergarten teacher and two teaching assistants. During the day the teacher and her assistants care for the children while the day care mothers and the supervisor see educational films, have discussions and relax. The camp provides the supervisor with the opportunity to intensively observe the day care mothers and the day care children.

The family day care system also provides an opportunity for the education of the parents. In addition to the informal advice given to the parents by the day care mother, the supervisor meets with all the parents in her district one evening each month. Discussion of various aspects of child care, health and child development are held. Each district provides parents and workers with educational pamphlets which have been specially prepared for the program, covering such topics as first-aid in the home. Another source of helpful information and assistance for both parents and day care mothers comes from the regularly scheduled visits of the public health child nurse.** During these visits

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The cost of family day care to the parents is the same as the cost for group day care and the reader is referred to our previous report on group day care for a discussion of parental fees. It should be noted here that, as with group day care, the Township guards the important relationship of parent and day care mother by serving as a fiscal intermediary, receiving payments from the parents and, in turn, paying the day care mothers. The governmental subsidizing arrangements described for group day care institutions hold also for family day care, whether the latter is of the formal Township sponsered type or the informal private initiative type.

Having described family day care homes in Denmark, what seem to be the advantages and disadvantages of the type of day care as compared with group day care institutions? On the basis of discussions with day care administrators as well as personal observations the authors found advantages included: closer approximation of a day care home to the child's own home; smaller likelihood of the transmission of communicable diseases; less absence from work for the natural nother due to the substitute day care mother-homemaker system; opportunity for those children from fatherless homes to associate closely with a father-figure in the person of the day care father; the opportunity for supportive help for the young, inexperienced or distraught natural mother of the child through the warm relationship with the day care mother; and the opportunity, in the emergencies which are more frequent in high risk homes, for a child to remain over night with his day care mother, which is not possible in a group day care center.

A principle disadvantage, on the other hand, appears to be the occasional necessity of moving a child from one family day care home to another or to a group day care institution if problems arise between parents and worker. Group day care institutions provide for greater flexibility of staff within the same setting

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already familiar to the child. In addition, the closer approximation of a family day care home to the child's own home is perhaps balanced by a lesser degree of certainty with regard to the quality of the caretaker in the family day care home as opposed to the highly trained child nurse in group day care institutions. Clearly children will be placed with a prospective day care mother during her probationary period and not all applicants will turn out to be qualified for this work. Other disadvantages of family day care as opposed to group day care institutions include the obvious inability for any private home to match the extraordinary physical facilities, including indoor and outdoor play equipment, available to the child in the group day care center.* Likewise it is not possible for any family home to provide the wide opportunity for contact with peers of all ages readily available in a group day care center.

The authors have already commented on the absence of any attempt by the Danes to measure the effectiveness of their family day care system for risk children. It would be, we feel, of advantage to the Danes as well as to others, to perform a variety of systematic studies of this system of child care.

There are potentials within the family day care system which both the Danes and the authors feel could well be explored. This system, to the present, has emphasized day care for the preschool child. It would seem that the system could serve very effectively in certain circumstances for afterschool care as well. This has begun, usually with "problem" children. The possible use of family day care homes as a place where chronically ill or disturbed hospitalized children can go each day for a few hours is also being explored at present. It is felt that the potential for parent education in this system is greater than that which exists at present and could be expanded.

What principles emerge from the Danish experience with family day care homes which are relevant to the United States?

1) It has been shown to be possible for a government to

* See our report on group day care.

conduct a program of surveillance for quality control of the extensive informal day care of children for pay in private family homes.

2) It has been shown possible to establish a governmentally sponsored system of family day care homes which insures a minimal standard of care for each child in this system. Important elements in this system include: nationwide standard setting with legal binding; local supervision through screening of workers, inservice training and regular observation.

3) Family day care homes may be preferable to group day care institutions for certain children. The Danish experience suggests this may include children whose development is at risk for physical, emotional or social reasons.

4) Some parents, for whatever reasons, prefer to leave their children in family day care homes and this type of care has popular appeal. Some parents, on the other hand, prefer to use group day care centers. There are, therefore, reasons stemming both from children's needs and from parental preferences for offering both types of day care services.

5) Family day care mothering can be a successful career for many women. This new profession can be made attractive and rewarding.

6) A family day care home system can expand exceedingly rapidly as there is no need for new facilities and there is a body of potential caretakers already in existence.

7) A family day care home system is an important source of strength to the family. The regular contacts between the qualified day care mother and the parents and the more formal parent education programs serve to assist the parents in their understanding of their child. The parents knowledge that the child is receiving warm, expert day care in a family setting together with the other services which may be available in special circumstances such as temporary overnight care, or a homemaker

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Family Day Care

when the child's mother is sick all serve to support the child's family during his years of growth and development.